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# IFAS EXTENSION

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

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## **Keeping holiday poinsettia colorful with proper care**

Poinsettias are a symbol of the season and a sure sign that the holidays have arrived. With proper care during this festive time, the life of the poinsettia can be extended.

The plant was named after Joel Poinsett who brought poinsettias to the United States in 1825 from their native Mexico. Poinsettias are traditionally grown as potted plants for use in the home during the holiday season.

These holiday plants are not offered exclusively in red any longer. Available in a wide variety of colors and forms, poinsettias can be found with red, pink, white, orange, purple, and multi-colored bracts.

Their colorful bracts are usually referred to as the flower, but are actually modified leaves. The true flowers of the poinsettia are inconspicuous. They are small, green and yellow nubs clustered in the centers of the bracts.

Poinsettias are considered to be tropical plants. They prefer to be in temperatures no colder than 65°F. Plants that have been exposed to cold temperatures or windy conditions before they are brought into the warm indoors may have reduced quality.

After purchasing your poinsettia, use a large, roomy shopping bag to protect your plant when transporting it. When you arrive home, place the plant in a warm location free of drafts and cold air. If possible, place it in an area where it will receive bright light. However, avoid placing plants in extremely sunny, hot, and dry situations.



Remove the decorative foil wrapper from the plant's container. The poinsettias will need to be watered periodically. If the foil wrapper remains on, it allows water to collect around the base of the plant, which can cause root rot. Only water the plant when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch. Water them sufficiently, but not too much. Most people kill their poinsettias with too much water. Remember this plant came from the tropical desert and is more tolerant of dry conditions.

If after the holiday season you want to keep your poinsettias, here are a few tips to keep them healthy and ready to be planted outside:

- Throughout the winter, keep the plants somewhat dry and do not fertilize.

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- When spring arrives, cut off the fading bracts, leaving four to six inches of the stem.
- Begin fertilizing with a well-balanced fertilizer.
- Move the plants outdoors to a partly shady situation.
- After a week or two, plant the poinsettias in a full-sun location.

Poinsettias can be planted in the landscape. However, along the Gulf Coast, they will be killed by a frost. If planted in a warm microclimate and protected, you may be able to get your poinsettias to rebloom.

Poinsettias should be planted in areas where they receive full sun most of the day and no artificial light at night. They should be planted in well-drained, fertile soils. Poinsettias will not grow well in wet areas. Fertilization, irrigation, and pruning are also essential for the growing success of your poinsettias. With proper care, your poinsettias can provide you with many years of holiday color and cheer.

For more information on poinsettias, review the UF/IFAS publication at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG352>.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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